
BLOCK IV

PATTERNS OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION

As individuals, few of us have much influence in politics. In order to have an impact on policies, we join others with like-minded interests or programmes. We use our democratic rights of assembly and freedom of speech to create or join groups to influence public policies or acquire power to shape those policies.

In this block, we turn to another equally significant aspect of Comparative Politics, actors and processes that link society and the governments. The first two units of this block examine the role of two major actors, political parties and pressure groups, and the last unit focuses on how electoral systems affect the actors involved in the political process.

Political parties are the most organised, the most powerful and seemingly inevitable organisations. Though they do not find a formal mention in most constitutions, they have become vital to a democracy. What are political parties and what distinguishes them from other political groups in society? What are party systems and what accounts for their variations? These are some of the questions taken up in **Unit 7** of this block.

Another important organisation that bridges society and the government is the pressure group. Unlike political parties, pressure groups seek to influence the powers which shape public policy rather than capture power. What are these organisations or groups? What methods do they adopt to influence public policy? What is their role in democratic politics? Do they have a role in non-democratic politics? These are the questions taken up in **Unit 8**.

A hallmark of modern democracy is the holding of free and fair elections. This means that the right to vote (suffrage or franchise) is open to all citizens and that votes are counted fairly. This having been said, there are clearly variations. **Unit 9** of this block discusses the complicated question of electoral rules, which decide how votes are cast, counted, and translated into seats in a legislature. As you will notice, these systems vary widely and make a huge difference in the distribution of political power.

UNIT 7 POLITICAL PARTIES AND PARTY SYSTEMS*

Structure

- 7.0 Objectives
- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Political Parties
- 7.3 Functions of Parties
- 7.4 Party and Party Systems
 - 7.4.1 Two Party System
 - 7.4.2 Multi-Party System
 - 7.4.3 One Party System
 - 7.4.4 Dominant Party System
- 7.5 Trends in the Evolution of Party Organisation
- 7.6 Let us Sum up
- 7.7 References
- 7.8 Answer to Check Your Progress Exercises

7.0 OBJECTIVES

Political parties are not part of the formal definition of democracy. They have however become indispensable in organised politics and most visible institutions of a democracy. This unit examines the role of political parties and party systems in contemporary politics. After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- Define a political party;
- Describe the functions performed by parties in a democracy;
- Identify different types of party systems;
- Trace the evolution of party policy and organisation; and
- Analyse the importance of political parties in a democratic structure.

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In ancient Greece, the city-state of Athens practised a system of direct democracy in which citizens participated in the decision-making process (though citizenship

*Dr. Priyamvada Mishra, Asst. Professor in Political Science, Symbiosis Law School, Noida

was restricted to adult males; and slaves and women were excluded). Today, citizens in a few Swiss Cantons (all voters meet in annual assemblies also called *Landsgemeinde*) and some towns of New England continue to gather, debate and vote in open meetings. But everywhere else, direct democracy has become impractical. Modern states are too large in territory and in population for a sizeable fraction of the citizenry to directly participate in governance. Moreover, the range and complexity of most issues that fall under public consideration are such that it has become impossible for a citizen to master them. As a result, indirect or representative democratic systems began to take shape in the late 18th century Europe and spread gradually to the rest of the world. In these systems, the citizens instead of deciding directly choose through regular elections, a number of politicians to set policy and govern them. Both because of the scale of modern political systems and the electoral and parliamentary dynamics of representative democracies, politicians were compelled to create or join electoral and legislative ‘teams’ or parties, that is, stable organizations through which they coordinate their political activity across electoral districts, in parliamentary assemblies, and in executive or governmental committees. These parties and party systems have become the constituent elements of modern representative democracies. Today, they are the most visible institutions of a representative democracy. They are the linkage making institutions between political leadership and voters, political elite and civil society, the rulers and the ruled in all representative democracies. In this unit, we will trace the evolution of political parties, identify their defining features, and describe the types of party systems.

7.2 POLITICAL PARTIES

It is difficult to imagine a modern democratic state without political parties. It is the political party which gathers people on common lines, mobilises them, shapes popular opinion and puts it across on a wider front on behalf of its supporters. However, during the early years of their evolution, up until the mid-19th century, party organisations and people identifying with them were regarded with suspicion and concern. They were regarded as harmful entities serving opposing groups within the society at the expense of individual liberty and common good. In fact, such groups were derogatively called as ‘factions’ rather than ‘parties’. It was only with the expansion of civil rights and electoral franchise in the latter half of the 19th century that political parties started gaining acceptance and popularity. At the beginning of the 20th century, Moisei Ostrogorski, a Russian political thinker recognised the growing importance of political parties in politics and prophetically said that “wherever this life of parties is developed, it focuses the political feelings and the active wills of its citizens” (1902). Indeed, in the next couple of decades, mass political parties were battling for votes in Western Europe while in other parts of Europe, ruling parties in totalitarian states (communist and fascist) sought to reconstruct society according to their vision of ideal society. In the developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, nationalist parties began to emerge as mass parties, mobilising people against colonial rule. Today, political parties have become synonymous with organised polity. In democratic systems, they have become indispensable, so much so that 20th century democracy has often been described as ‘party democracy’.

If political parties are the agencies which facilitate the political process, what are they and what distinguishes them from other social groups, like civil societies, associations, clubs etc.? Given their ubiquity, we would assume that it would be easy to arrive at a consensus. But political parties have been evolving over time and in specific national contexts-with different genesis, organizations, ideologies, electoral campaign resources, patterns of competition etc. Political science scholars have therefore found it difficult to arrive at a precise definition of a party. Moreover, their definition of political parties has undergone change over a period of time.

In his famous political pamphlet, *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents* (1770), Edmund Burke defined a party as a “body of men united for promoting by their joint endeavours the national interest upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed”.

Roughly a century later, Max Weber, the famous German sociologist, shifted the attention from the promotion of national interest to that of power. He argued that ‘(parties) action is oriented toward the acquisition of social power, that is to say, toward influencing social action no matter what its content may be’. Following Weber, Robert Michels, Maurice Duverger and Joseph Schumpeter have emphasised that the primary goal of a political party is conquest of power or a share in its exercise. Schumpeter, the Austrian political economist, for instance has defined a party as “a group whose members propose to act in concert in the *competitive struggle for political power*”. In a similar vein, Anthony Downs, an early exponent of rational choice theory in politics, defined a party as “a team of men seeking to control the governing apparatus by gaining office in a duly constituted election”. Gilchrist elaborates this aspect and defined a political party as ‘an organised group of citizens who profess to share the same political views and who, by acting as a political unit, try to control the government’.

Giovanni Sartori, an Italian scholar of comparative politics, shifted attention from the function of conquest of governmental office to the candidate selection function. According to him a party is “any political group identified by an official label that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through elections (free or non-free), candidates for public office”.

These definitions of political parties, as you can see, focus on some aspects and dimensions of political parties and miss out on others. For instance, as White has highlighted, not all parties ‘compete’ to appoint some candidates in public office. There are a few small parties which are not interested in gaining access to the government or parliamentary seats. Instead, they function to lend voice to a peculiar identity or standing claims. In some cases, their function is to say that they are ‘there’, i.e. the voters and the elected representative exist, even though they represent a tiny minority of the electorate.

From the perspective of comparative politics, we need to have a minimal operational definition so that we know what a party *is* and what a party *is not*. This has become important in recent years because of emergence of several social and hybrid organisations that seek to have a voice in policy process. In this context, La Palombara and Myron Weiner (1966: 6) provide a broader, albeit a

longer definition of party, which can be described as an operational definition; in their words:

When we speak of political parties, we do not mean a loosely knit of group of notables with limited and intermittent relationships to local counterparts. Our definition requires instead: (I) continuity in organization, i.e., an organization whose expected life span is not dependent on the life of current leaders; (II) manifest and presumably permanent organization at local level, with regularized communication and other relationship between locals and national units, (III) self-conscious determination of leader, at both national and local levels to capture and to hold decision making power alone or in coalition with other, not simply to influence of exercise of power; and (IV) a concern on the part of the organization for seeking followers at the polls or in some manner striving for popular support.

A look at some of the functions of a political party also helps in better understanding what a party is and what it is not. In fact, as we saw, some scholars in the process of defining a party have drawn our attention to the vital functions of a party.

7.3 FUNCTIONS OF PARTIES

What do parties do for democratic governments that make them indispensable or the *sine qua non* of a modern political society? We identify six categories of functions that political parties perform in a democratic political system.

Firstly, political parties unite sectional interests, bridge the geographical differences, and induce cohesion. In other words, parties perform the function of **interest aggregation**, that is, they gather together (aggregate) the various interests, priorities and options of their leaders and constituents and shape them into common goals and policy proposals. This ensures both order and system maintenance. The interest aggregation function of political parties stands in sharp contrast to that of interest or pressure groups which work only for the advancement of the cause their own groups.

Secondly, political parties contribute to democratic government by **nominating candidates** for election to public office. In the absence of parties, voters would be confronted with a bewildering array of self-nominated candidates, each seeking a narrow victory over others because of personal friendships, fame, or name. Parties minimize this danger by setting up their candidates in different constituencies. They carry out campaigns to win elections. They also defray the cost of contesting elections where the candidate is from an economically disadvantaged background.

Again, political parties help democratic government by **structuring voting choice** reducing the number of candidates on the ballot to those who have realistic chance of winning. Parties that have won sizeable portions of the vote in past elections are likely to win comparable portions of the vote in the future also. This discourages non-party or non-serious candidates from running for the office. This in turn focuses the election on the contest between parties and on candidates

with established records, which reduces the amount of new information that voters need to make a rational decision.

Another critical function of a party is that of **coordination** within government. In addition to coordinating within society and between government and society at large through its interest aggregation function, a political party acts as a bridge between the legislature and the executive in both presidential and parliamentary forms of government. Political parties structure coordination between different levels of government-national, regional and local. As we saw in Unit 5 of this course, the presidential system, as in the United States, is based on the principle of separation of powers between the three organs of the government. The President and leaders of the House of Representatives and Senate are not required to cooperate with one another. Political parties are the major means for bridging the separation of powers, of producing co-ordinated policies that can govern the country effectively. Individuals of the same party in the presidency, the House, and the Senate are likely to share political principles and thus to cooperate in making policy. In a parliamentary political system, where the formation and continuance of the real executive, i.e, the Council of Ministers, depends on the support of the majority in legislature, political parties perform the task of disciplining the members of the majority to keep them united for providing the lifeline support to the government. This role of political parties has, in fact, made them informal governments in democracies as the powers of the legislature have now been usurped, to a great extent, by political parties.

Similarly, in both federal and unitary forms of government, political parties structure coordination between different levels of government. When parties perform this function comprehensively and effectively, “it becomes reasonable to regard parties as organisations, rather than the individual politicians who hold office in their name, as central political actors”. (Richard Katz)

Political parties also help voters choose candidates by proposing **alternative programmes of government action** in the form of party manifestos. The specific policies advocated in an election campaign may vary from candidate to candidate and from election to election, the types of policies advocated by candidates of one party nonetheless usually tend to differ from those proposed by candidates of other parties. In the case of the United States, for example, even though the neutrality of the names of major political parties, namely, Democratic and Republican suggests that they are undifferentiated in their policies, in reality, however, these parties regularly adopt very different policies in their platforms.

Though victory is certainly the first commandment of a political party, in a democracy defeat of party also does not mean its demise. In that case, a party functions as **a critic and watchdog of the government's policy**. Political parties, thus, play an extremely significant role in democracies. While, on the one hand, they must maintain and strengthen the structure of democratic norms and values; on the other, they have to secure maximal mobilisation for social and economic development. Political parties have thus to induce both political and socio-economic development.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with the answer given at the end of the unit.

- 1) On which two aspects does Edmund Burke emphasize in his definition of a party?

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- 2) How can political parties be distinguished from ideological organizations, associations, clubs?

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7.4 PARTY AND PARTY SYSTEMS

In a system of democratic politics, political parties constantly interact and respond to each other in a competitive struggle to shape or influence the government. This inter-party competition generates a systemic pattern or institutional arrangement of party life and party interaction known as the 'party system'. Party system represents the whole political spectrum in which political parties are the constituent units. There are significant variations in the arrangement, functions and number of political parties in a system. These and other similar characteristics are often used to describe and classify the party system of different polities. For instance, they have been classified based on competitiveness of opposition (Robert Dahl, 1966), on the degree of institutionalisation (Mainwaring, 1999) and on the extent of citizen involvement in politics (La Palombara and Weiner, 1966).

The most widely accepted criterion, however, has been the number of parties, often defined in terms of their relative sizes. Several scholars of comparative politics have classified party systems based on the numbers of parties or their relative sizes. Most of such classifications have been modification of the system initially proposed by the two French political scientists, Maurice Duverger and Jean Blondel. Duverger (1954) pioneered the classification of party systems by identifying two broad categories: (i) one party system and (ii) pluralist party system. In the first category, he included two types (a) one-party system, and (b) dominant party system, whereas, in the second category, he included: (a) two-party system and (b) multi-party system. Blondel (1968) carried forward the work on classification of party system by not only defining the types identified by Duverger in operational terms, but also introduced additional categories. On

the basis of share of votes, Blondel distinguished two party systems, two-and-a-half party systems, multiparty systems with a predominant party and multiparty systems without a predominant party. His typology was derived by investigating clusters in the average share of the vote won by the largest two parties and then considering the ratio of the first party's share to that of the second and third parties. In the two party systems like in the case of the United States, New Zealand, Australia, the United Kingdom, and Austria, the two party share was 90 percent and above and closely balanced between the two parties. In the next cluster, the two party share ranged from 75-80% of the vote cast but there was a wider average difference (10.5%) between the first and second parties as in Canada, the Federal Republic of Germany and Ireland. Taking account of imbalance in the share of the vote, Blondel categorized these as two-and-a-half rather than three party systems. Blondel classified all others as genuinely multiparty systems that can be divided into multiparty systems with a predominant party (for example, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Italy and Iceland) and multiparty system without a predominant party (Netherlands, Switzerland, France, and Finland). These types are distinguished by the share of the vote obtained solely by the largest party; the threshold being set at 40 percent.

Blondel's typology has been useful in highlighting the differences and similarities among pure two party systems and systems (prevailing in Canada and the Federal Republic of Germany) where two larger parties coexisted with a relatively smaller 'half' party with a capacity to play a balancing role between them.

Keeping in view the broad classifications given by Duverger and Blondel, we may classify all the parties as: two-party systems; multi-party systems; and one-party systems. All the three are discussed below, along with a variant, the one-party dominant system.

7.4.1 Two-Party System

In a two-party system, the two major political parties generally share core values though they may differ on specifics. Neither of the two is more stable or powerful than the other on a permanent basis. There is a constant competition between the two parties for securing majority of popular votes and seats in the legislature. Both the parties keep on occupying either the treasury benches or sit in the opposition, though this may not always be alternate. Besides, there may be one or more smaller parties also in the two-party system. But the smaller parties neither come to power nor do they normally influence the outcome of elections, though at times smaller parties may associate themselves with one or the other major party. As we saw, in Blondel's calculus, these parties fall under the category of two and half parties. At times, a third emerging party may even compete with the major parties, as was done in 1970s by the Liberal-Democratic Party in Britain. Some examples of two-party system are given below:

1. The modern political party system in the U.S. is a two-party system dominated by the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. These two parties have won every United States presidential election since 1852 and have controlled the United States Congress to some extent since at least 1856.

2. United Kingdom is not quite a two-party system as other parties have significant support. The major parties were Conservative and Labour Party. The Liberal Democrats were the third largest party until the 2015 general election when they were overtaken by the Scottish National Party in terms of seats and UK political party membership, and by the UK Independence Party in terms of votes.
3. Two political groups dominate the Australian political spectrum, forming a de facto two-party system. One is the Australian Labour Party (ALP), a centre-left party which is formally linked to the Australian labour movement. The other group is a conservative grouping of parties that are in coalition at the federal level.

7.4.2 Multi-Party system

With the evolution of society and the democratic processes, multiple parties emerged each with its unique ideology and beliefs or objective. Multi-party system is characterized by the presence of a fairly large number of parties, big or small, contesting for power through election. This system is found in both developed and developing countries. In this system, the party which gets the highest number of seats forms the government. You will be reading about methods of representation later in this block, here you should note that in some situations when no party receives clear majority to form the government, two or more like minded parties may come together and form a coalition government. Such governments generally adopt a common minimum programme for governance, as they do not have commitment to any one ideology. A few good examples of multi-party system are the following:

1. Switzerland has a multi-party system. Since 1959, the four largest parties have formed a coalition government, according to a Zauberformel or "magic formula". This arithmetic formula divides the seven cabinet seats among representatives of the four largest parties.
2. Austria has a multi-party system. Of the over 700 registered political parties, only few are known to the larger public like Austrian People's Party, Social Democratic Party of Austria and Freedom Party of Austria. Since the 1980s, four parties have consistently received enough votes to get seats in the national parliament.
3. Belgium is a federal state with a multi-party system, with numerous parties like New Flemish Alliance, Christian Democratic and Flemish and Socialist Party who factually have no chance of gaining power alone, and therefore must work with each other to form coalition governments. Almost all Belgian political parties are divided into linguistic groups, either Dutch-speaking parties, Francophone parties or Germanophone parties.
4. New Zealand national politics features a pervasive party system. Usually, all members of Parliament's unicameral House of Representatives belong to a political party. Independent candidates succeed rarely. While the two primary parties do indeed still dominate the New Zealand political landscape, the country now more closely resembles a multi-party state since the introduction of proportional representation, where smaller parties can reasonably expect to

play a role in government. As of May 2018, five parties have representatives in Parliament.

5. Political parties in Italy are numerous and since World War II no party has ever gained enough support to govern alone. Parties thus form political alliances and coalition governments. In the 2018 general election three groupings obtained most of the votes and most of the seats in the two houses of the Italian Parliament: a centre-right coalition, composed of the League, Forza Italia, the Brothers of Italy and minor allies; the anti-establishment Five Star Movement; a centre-left coalition, composed of the Democratic Party and minor allies.
6. India is an established multi-party democracy comprising of national, regional, state level parties. As per latest publication from Election Commission of India, the total number of parties registered was 2599, with 8 national parties, 53 state parties and 2538 unrecognised parties. Multiple parties collaborate together to form coalition government both at State and Centre.

7.4.3 One-Party system

As the name suggests, this system allows a single party to hold power. Minor parties can be allowed to exist, but they have to by default accept the leadership of the single existing party. This single party might not exactly be referred to the government, but the cadre and leadership within the party are more influential than the government. Single party systems are often placed lowest in the scale of democratic index and are equated with authoritarian regime and tyranny. Some of the prominent examples of one-party system in contemporary times are given below.

1. North Korea is governed by Kim dynasty which will rule eternally according to the fundamental principles of the ruling party known as the Workers Party of Korea.
2. People's Republic of China was declared as a de-facto one party state, i.e. Communist Party of China with the President as the General Secretary.
3. The only legal political party in Vietnam is known as the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV). The party centrally controls state organs, the media, and the military. The Vietnamese Fatherland Front party (VFF) exists without many powers because the constitution of Vietnam gives CPV the supremacy under Article 4.
4. In Cuba no political party can hold campaign meetings. The President of Communist Party of Cuba is elected to office for every five years, and there is no restriction as to number of times, he can contest for the same seat.

7.4.4 Dominant Party System

In a dominant party system, several political parties exist but only one party has the capabilities to form the government. In this system, though rooted in democratic traditions, other parties have rare chance of coming to power. The emergence of the dominant party system can be attributed to several factors such as popularity among the masses, its historical lineage, charismatic leadership, strong organizational structures, etc. The Congress dominance in India from

1952-1967 could be seen as the predominant party system. The Bharatiya Janata Party which is in power at the Centre since May 2014 and in many states in India is also seen as dominant party.

7.5 TRENDS IN THE EVOLUTION OF PARTY ORGANISATION

In the early stages of their evolution, parties were created internally within the parliament, to voice common concerns and fight an effective campaign. They are also referred to as caucus parties. As we saw, in the early 19th century, very few people qualified for suffrage and therefore a few elites, nobles, aristocrats and wealthy people came together for the governance or implementation of public policies.

With the rise of nationalism in many parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America in the first half of the 20th century as well as the spread of adult franchise, the parties broadened their appeal. This led to the rise of mass parties, parties with large membership and a bureaucratic, centralised, and hierarchical form of organisation. These mass parties originated outside the parliament, challenging the established ideology or rule, trying to seek their own representation.

Until the mid-20th century, most Western democracies were dominated by particularistic parties, that is, parties that confine their appeal to a particular segment of the population. Conservative parties tended to reflect the attitudes of the aristocratic upper classes and the wealthier members of the business class, while working-class parties sought their votes almost exclusively from the working masses in urban industrial centres. Agrarian parties promoted the interests of farmers. These parties were defined essentially by their social class base. But in the latter half of the 20th century, universal adult franchise on the one hand and the massive loss of lives and property during the Second World War weakened the traditional social cleavages. These changes compelled political parties to move towards catch-all organisation or rainbow coalitions that appealed to a wide variety of social groups and interests. The term 'catch-all' party was coined by Otto Kirchheimer who while studying party transformation in Europe observed that many parties (Social Democratic and Christian Democratic parties) in order to win elections and take over the government, were trying to catch all the votes they can, drawing them from a diversity of social classes, religions, ethnic groups, and other segments of the population. In the process they were loosening their commitment to specific groups or principles. Many, both within the party and outside, lamented that the rise of catch-all parties was leading to disappearance of 'principled opposition' which led to a politics devoid of substance, conflict and choice. Nevertheless, particularistic parties continued to exist in Europe and elsewhere advancing the interests of religious groups, environment, women's rights etc.

In the recent past, with the spread of information and communication technologies, political parties are facing new organisational challenges. New technologies and social media are making it easier for parties to connect with their supporters and mobilise new group of people. While this has decreased the financial burden on the parties, which earlier relied on mass meetings, one-on-

one campaigning, parties no longer require deeper roots in society. Secondly, in many countries parties are losing their mass and competitive character and becoming cartel parties. Cartel parties often collaborate with each other for state resources (money and patronage) as well as career stability and continuity for their leaders. Parties, in other words, are becoming part of the machinery of the state. Finally, it is said that party policy and organisation is now as much a technical and professional matter as an ideological one. The widespread use of communication technologies in society has led parties to rely on professionals to bolster their public image. Most successful parties run highly centralised and technically skilled party operations and election campaigns. This often involves opinion polling, focus groups, spin doctors, carefully planned public relations and use of mass media, including social media.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with the answer given at the end of the unit.

1) Distinguish between a dominant party system and one-party system.

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2) Define a coalition government.

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7.6 LET US SUM UP

Parties and party systems have become the constituent elements of modern representative democracies. Today, they are the most visible institutions of a representative democracy. They are the linkage making institutions between political leadership and voters, political elite and civil society, the rulers and the ruled in all representative democracies.

Parties perform vital functions, making them indispensable in a democratic set up. Political parties are instrumental in aggregating interests, channelizing the efforts of people bound by common belief structure, providing leadership, giving shapes to movement, forming governments, and checking on the policies of the ruling parties, working for the larger interests of society etc. Classification of party systems on the basis of numbers is the widely accepted system. As we saw, Duverger and Blondel evolved the number-based classification system which has stood the test of time with minor modifications. Based on this classification, we

have briefly examined Two-party systems; Multi-party systems; One-party systems and the dominant party system.

In Britain and the United States, for example, a system of two-party prevails while in majority of countries including India, France, Bangladesh, Switzerland etc. a multi-party system has come into existence. On the other hand, in authoritarian and communist countries like China, Cuba and North Korea, one-party system operates.

Unlike the United States, most democracies around the world follow the British system of parliamentary democracy. Most of them have multi-party system where different parties compete for votes in the election. But such a multi-party system often does not produce clear majority in election, resulting in the formation of coalition governments.

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7.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Exercise1

- 1) Burke' definition focuses on two aspects: a) Political parties are organizations composed by persons; and b) Parties have specific goals they want to pursue.
- 2) Political parties have an objective of occupying power i.e. to form a government. Political parties can be regional, linguistic in nature but are very wide as compared to ideological organizations, associations, clubs.

Check Your Progress2

- 1) In a dominant party system, several political parties exist but only one party has the capabilities to form the government, whereas one party-system clearly has single accepted political party. However, in both the cases, that single party only wins elections.
- 2) A coalition government is a form of government in which political parties cooperate, reducing the dominance of any one party within that "coalition". The usual reason for this arrangement is that no party on its own can achieve a majority in the election.



UNIT 8 PRESSURE GROUPS*

Structure

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Defining Pressure Groups
- 8.3 Origin of Pressure Groups
- 8.4 Pressure Groups and Other Social Groups
 - 8.4.1 Pressure Groups and Interest Groups
 - 8.4.2 Pressure Groups and Political Parties
 - 8.4.3 Pressure Groups and Civil Society Organizations
- 8.5 Characteristics of Pressure Groups
- 8.6 Classification of Pressure Groups
 - 8.6.1 Institutional Pressure Groups
 - 8.6.2 Associational Pressure Groups
 - 8.6.3 Non-Associational Pressure Groups
 - 8.6.4 Anomic Pressure Groups
- 8.7 Methods and Techniques of Pressure Groups
 - 8.7.1 Lobbying
 - 8.7.2 Shaping Public Opinion
 - 8.7.3 Publicity and Propaganda
 - 8.7.4 Strikes and Agitations
- 8.8 Pressure Groups in Modern Political System
- 8.9 LetUs Sum Up
- 8.10 References
- 8.11 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

8.0 OBJECTIVES

As we saw in the last unit, political parties provide the critical link between citizens and the government in a democracy. Pressure groups, the subject of this unit, also perform a similar role and contribute to the policy process. After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the meaning and characteristics of pressure groups;

*Dr. Kishorchand Nongmaithem, Consultant, Faculty of Political Science, School of Social Sciences, Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi

- Distinguish pressure groups from political parties, interest groups, civil society
- Classify pressure groups;
- Describe the methods, strategies and techniques used by pressure groups; and
- Explain the role of pressure groups in democratic politics.

8.1 INTRODUCTION

We normally associate modernization with the widespread belief that the conditions of life can be altered through human action. But modernisation is also associated with economic and social changes like industrialisation, urbanisation, modern education, spread of public communications etc. These changes lead to an increasing diversity of life conditions which results in the formation of large numbers of special interest groups. Most democracies provide scope for such special interest groups to express their needs. These groups, commonly identified as ‘interest groups’ or ‘pressure groups’, seek to protect or advance their collective interests and also to obtain public policy outcomes favourable to them by pressurizing the government and other state apparatus. Such groups have come to play an important role in the political system by organising individuals into groups and then linking them with the political system. In this sense, pressure groups act as mediating institutions between the government and the governed in a democratic polity.

8.2 DEFINING PRESSURE GROUPS

The task of defining ‘pressure group’ in a single universally acceptable definition is a difficult one. Consider the following definitions of pressure groups:

- “organised groups possessing both formal structure and real common interests in so far as they influence the decisions of public bodies” -W.J.M. Mackenzie.
- “organisations ... trying to influence the policy of public bodies in their own chosen direction, though never themselves prepared to undertake the direct Government of the country” -Samuel Finer.
- “an association of individuals joined together by a common interest, belief, activity or purpose that seeks to achieve its objectives, further its interests and enhance its status in relation to other groups, by gaining the approval and co-operation of authority in the form of favourable policies, legislation and conditions” -Peter Shipley.
- “organizations which seeks to influence government policy without at the same time being willing to accept the responsibility of public office” -N.C. Hunt.

Despite differences in their emphasis, these definitions make it clear that pressure groups are voluntary social groups characterized by persuasive activism to achieve a desirable change or to prevent an undesirable change. Their activism, often termed as ‘pressure politics’ involves various methods to influence the

government and other state apparatus like legislatures, executives, or individuals in responsible positions of decision-making and implementation of public policies.

In the recent times, pressure groups also emerged in the form of social movements on issues like protection of environment, corruption, human rights, education, health, livelihood etc. For example, groups like Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) or India Against Corruption (IAC) have propagated public awareness on issues of environment protection and corruption respectively while pressurizing the government for a better policy outcome.

Pressure groups vary in terms of size and influence as well as the area of operation. Some are relatively small, formed on the basis of highly specific interests, and operate at local or domestic level, while others are extremely large and powerful with some of them even operating beyond national boundaries. For example, groups like Confederation of Free Trade Union, Council of European Federation of Industry, Amnesty International, Anti-Apartheid Movement, Oxfam and Friends of Earth are some of the groups that operate across national boundaries. Moreover, there are also collective groups like the World Social Forum (WSF) formed by different civil societies, advocacy groups, and social movements from different countries but operate at the global level. Thus, whatever be their size, strength and area of operation, pressure groups have come to play an enormously important role in society and politics, and are considered to be a vital component of modern political system.

The World Social Forum (WSF) is a collective solidarity forum of various civil society groups, non-governmental organizations, groups of farmers, intellectuals, women, youths, etc. from around the world whose aim is to condemn the harmful effects of globalisation and working towards the establishment of a better world. The group organised its annual Forum for the first time in 2001 in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Since then the forum organises its anti-globalization campaigns in various parts of the world. The forum then emerged as a challenger or alternative to the World Economic Forum which has been organized in Davos, Switzerland, denouncing its neoliberal economic policies. The WSF is known for its opposition to globalization driven by neoliberalism and defended by global financial institutions like the WTO, IMF and other multinational corporations.

8.3 ORIGIN OF PRESSURE GROUPS

The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle in his book, *Politics*, famously said, 'Man is by nature a social animal'. This idea of Aristotle implies that man cannot live alone and that men enter into relationship with others to live a social and political life. This behaviour of men incentivises them to form social groups in almost every sphere of life. Therefore, as many scholars also suggested, ever since the inception of organized human society there had been groups in society

whose character and activities were similar to what we identify today as pressure groups. In this regard, 'groups' and 'group politics' can be considered as old as the human society itself. People belonging to different sections of the society, be it religion, caste, ethnicity, profession, trade unions, farmers came together and voluntarily organized themselves in order to advance their interests.

Pressure groups gained prominence in the modern times, particularly after the American and French revolutions in the late 18th century. The spread of democratic rights, ideas and values led to an astonishing increase in the number of pressure groups. Prominent among the new pressure groups are those of minorities and women. They have come together to demand social and political rights to ensure that they are not subjugated. For instance, the Abolition Society in Britain was founded in 1787 to oppose the slave trade. Similarly, the Society for Women's Rights was founded in France in 1866 with the purpose of exerting a worldwide women's suffrage movement. Thus, by the end of the 19th century, many such groups asserting the interests of business groups, trade unions etc., had become operationalised in most of the industrial societies.

Despite the pressure groups coming to prominence in democratic politics, the discipline of political science had hardly given any attention to their role and influence in political processes. Arthur F Bentley, an American social scientist, who is regarded as the founder of the group theory, wrote in 1908 that it was only through the analysis of group activities that one could achieve a true knowledge of government. It was, however, only in the mid-twentieth century that the study of group politics began to attract political scientists. Some of the pioneers of group-centred approach in the study of politics are David B Truman, Earl Latham, WJM Mackenzie, S.E Finer, and Joseph La Palombara.

8.4 PRESSURE GROUPS AND OTHER SOCIAL GROUPS

It is easily conceivable that there can be many kinds of groups in a political system which may be organized and cohesive such as interest groups, political parties, civil society organizations (CSOs) and so on. Although these groups exist to serve their common interests, they differ from what we identified as pressure groups. Therefore, we should be able to differentiate pressure groups from other entities.

8.4.1 Pressure Groups and Interest Groups

Among the many social groups, interest groups are possibly the closest to pressure groups. In fact, many scholars do not make a distinction between pressure groups and interest groups and they often treat the two as synonymous. Alan R Ball (1994: 103), for example, puts pressure groups under the same category as interest groups, attitude groups etc. He defined these groups as "social aggregates with some level of chosen and shared aims which attempt to influence the political decision-making process". Likewise, Robert H. Salisbury also argued 'pressure group is only more pejorative but perhaps more familiar a term for interest groups'. For these scholars, pressure groups, in a sense, are

similar to interest groups in that they strive to achieve the interests of their members.

There are other groups of scholars who seek to differentiate pressure groups from interest groups. They believe that pressure groups always attempt to influence the government's decision-making process, whereas interest groups do not necessarily have the intention to do so. Interest groups merely insist on promoting their interests to achieve their specific goals but they do not exert pressure on the government. Therefore, the word 'pressure' can be taken as the basic point of distinction between the two. For these scholars, pressure groups are far more powerful than interest groups or any group of similar kind because they have the intent or capability to pressurize the government to get policy decisions favourable to them. In this regard, Hugh A. Bone says, "every group is an interest group or a group with an interest, but not every group attempts to influence public policy". This implies that interest groups transformed themselves into pressure groups when they begin to influence the decision-making process. In a sense, one can say that all pressure groups are interest groups but not all interest groups necessarily transform into pressure groups.

There are other scholars who avoid the use of the term 'pressure group'. They argue that the term carries a negative connotation as it insinuates the threat of use of force to achieve their objectives. These scholars prefer to use labels such as 'sectional' 'organized' 'the lobby' or 'interests' groups to refer to the whole range of groups that strive for a specific interest in society. Whether they are called interest groups, attitude groups, or pressure groups, they exist to serve their respective group's interests and all of them in one way or the other exert some pressure on the government (Watts 2007: 6). Despite the ambiguous line of demarcation between pressure groups and these groups, one can still make the distinction that 'pressure groups' generally refers those groups that actively seek to influence public policy.

8.4.2 Pressure Groups and Political Parties

Both pressure groups and political parties are important agencies which aim to achieve the interests of different sections of society. In some respects, the roles of pressure groups are parallel to those of political parties—as agents of political mobilization and representation by linking the government and the governed. But there are theoretical and practical distinctions between the two. While political parties aim to get into power and form the government, pressure groups generally seek to influence and pressurize the government in accordance with the particular interests and aspirations of the people they represent. Unlike political parties whose central objective is to capture power and run the government, pressure groups never aim to gain formal control of the government. Instead, pressure groups devote themselves to influence the government to realize their demands and objectives. In other words, pressure groups seek to influence government, parties seek to become government.

Another distinction between pressure groups and political parties is that while the former focus on only one policy area, the latter have broad programmes covering all (or almost all) policy areas. For instance, trade unions or human rights groups

are concerned with limited goals of protecting or promoting welfare of the workers or human rights. They rarely concern themselves with economic or external policies, except when those policies impinge on their interests. Political parties on the other hand are concerned with diverse policies related to national development.

However, the distinction between political parties and pressure groups can sometimes be extremely complicated by the fact that some pressure groups are found to have close relationship with one political party or another. In fact, there are pressure groups which render support to certain political parties whenever they think their political purpose can be served by supporting them and vice-versa. On the other hand, there are also pressure groups which have transformed into political parties. For example, the Labour parties in Britain and Australia had their origins in the working people's movements. Likewise, in India, Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, the Mizo National Front (MNF) in Mizoram and the Aam Admi Party (AAP) in Delhi were pressure groups before they become political parties. However, in general, most pressure groups seek to keep some distance rather than to develop close links with political parties.

8.4.3 Pressure Groups and Civil Society Organizations

Pressure groups are also often equated with civil society organizations (CSOs). Civil society organizations are organizations and associations set up by the citizens of a country to pursue certain interests. While some of the civil society organizations act as interest groups to promote their respective interests, others pressurize the government to bring about certain public policies in their group's interests. In India, civil society groups like Lok Satta, Jannagraha, and Foundation of Democratic Reforms (FDR) are persuading political parties to create avenues for legitimate funding to political parties with transparency and disclosure. They also significantly contributed in the improvement of voter registration in India. The group FDR in particular, also works for transparency, right to information, speedy delivery of justice by the judiciary etc. However, what differentiates pressure groups from CSOs is that pressure groups are more power-centric than CSOs which are interest oriented. Moreover, the domains of pressure groups are relatively restricted compared to CSOs whose arenas of functioning are usually vast and diverse.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with the answer given at the end of the unit.

- 1) Define pressure groups. How are pressure groups different from interest groups?

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2) Explain the difference between pressure groups and political parties.

8.5 CHARACTERISTICS OF PRESSURE GROUPS

Pressure groups came into existence to serve the interest of the community or group they represent. Therefore, their objectives and demands are different depending upon the collective interest of the particular group. However, despite their differences, pressure groups exhibit certain characteristics in common. A fundamental characteristic of pressure groups is that they neither contest elections nor attempt to directly involve in the governmental affairs. Instead, they aim to pressurize government agencies, bureaucrats, and politicians to get public policies in their favour. While doing this political bargaining, pressure groups always try to maintain a neutral political position by concentrating on their specific demands. Therefore, pressure groups are sometimes considered as 'apolitical' groups. However, they may enter into the arena of electoral politics by financing or supporting the party or candidate who they think will work in their interests. In this regard, pressure groups also try to maintain good relationship with political parties, politicians or high-ranking executives of the government in order to win their co-operation or support in group's interests. Pressure groups, however, have no permanent political affiliation and generally try to keep their group interest above political interests. They, therefore, wish to win the co-operation of whichever party controls the government of the day.

Since pressure groups emerged from specific sections of the society, their arena of functioning is generally restricted. However, their demands may be many (social, political or economic) and they may vary from time to time while the group remains intact. This flexibility of demands and objectives is an important characteristic of pressure groups. Another characteristic of pressure group is their emphasis on the need for a collective approach rather than an individualistic approach. They believed that group activities are more effective than activities of individuals.

8.6 CLASSIFICATION OF PRESSURE GROUPS

Pressure groups have been classified by several scholars into different categories on the basis of their structure and organization. Among them the four-fold classification given by Almond and Coleman is more suitable and widely applicable. They are:

8.6.1 Institutional Pressure Groups

Institutional pressure groups are those groups which are formed in various institutions, including government institutions like schools, colleges, universities, judiciary, bureaucracies, hospitals, police etc. Since these pressure groups exist within formal organizations formed by professionally employed personnel like doctors, lawyers, teachers, they are highly organized in accordance with proper rules and regulations. Therefore, they are also known as professional pressure groups. In India, groups like Civil Services Association, Police Families Welfare Association, Defence Personnel Association, Indian Medical Association, All India Bar Association, etc. all come under this category. They are formed in order to serve their interests without directly getting involved in the government. Since they are close to the government they can easily influence the government. Apart from articulating their own interest, they may also articulate and represent the interest of other groups. For example, a pressure group in the Ministry of Agriculture can easily and effectively convince other ministries or bureaucrats on behalf of the interests of farmers.

8.6.2 Associational Pressure Groups

These groups are highly organized and specialized groups formed to pursue limited goals. Associational pressure group includes organization of businessmen and industrialists like Associated Chambers of Commerce (ASSOCAM), Confederation of Indian Industries (CII), Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) etc. These groups, by virtue of their vast array of resources, technical and managerial knowledge and their close links with elite groups in the government are among the most influential pressure groups. Some of these groups are so powerful that even political parties are dependent on them for funds and other resources, and in turn, government sometimes serves them by giving concessions in the reduction of tax, tariff, trade etc. In some cases, the government even seeks suggestions and advice of these groups on major policy issues of economic and commercial aspects. This category also includes workers and peasants' unions such as All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), Bharatiya Kisan Sangh, Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh and student's organizations like Akhil Bharatiya Vidhyarthi Parishad (ABVP), National Students Union of India (NSUI), Students Federation of India (SFI), etc. Therefore, this category is sometimes divided into different types such as business groups, trading groups, agrarian groups, worker groups, and student groups and so on.

8.6.3 Non-Associational Pressure Groups

This category refers to those groups which are informal in nature brought together by religion, culture and traditions, kinship, ethnicity, tribal affiliation, or family ties etc. There is no formal and structural procedure in their activities and demands. They do not have permanent demands or interests. Their demands and interests keep changing according to requirements of a specific situation. Non-associational pressure groups are mostly based on language, ethnicity, religion or any other socio-cultural aspects in the society. They are more concerned with

community service focusing on protection and promotion of the interest of the whole community. Therefore, they are also known as socio-cultural pressure groups. In India, religious based groups such as Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Shiromani Gurudwara Prabhandhak Samiti or caste-based groups like Lorik Sena, Bhumi Sena, Vaishya Samaj, Balmiki Samaj, etc. are some examples of socio-religious and cultural pressure groups. These groups are formed with the aim of protecting and promoting the culture, tradition and beliefs of particular religious, ethnic or cultural communities.

8.6.4 Anomic Pressure Groups

Anomic pressure groups are those which appear for a short span of time for specific objectives and purpose. In Almond's words, they are 'more or less spontaneous groups, penetrated into the political system from the society'. These groups are generally formed in response to unpredictable moments like, famine, drought, scarcity of resources or any similar kind of urgency. Since these groups are spontaneous in nature depending upon the spur of the moment, they are not guided by any rule or procedural structure. As a result, their behaviour and actions are also quite unpredictable which often turns violent. For example, famine relief groups like Mizo National Famine Front in Mizoram or the Assam Gona Parishad formed during the Assam Movement can be termed as anomic pressure groups. Once the purpose is served, most of them ceased to exist while others may transform into political parties like in the case of Shiv Sena in Maharashtra or the Mizo National Front (MNF) in Mizoram.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with the answer given at the end of the unit.

1) What are the four types of pressure groups classified by Almond and Coleman?

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8.7 METHODS AND TACTICS OF PRESSURE GROUPS

We know that pressure groups constantly endeavour to shape public policy. For this, they use different methods and tactics. And tactics adopted by pressure groups are not similar because, their choice of tactics is determined by various factors such as the nature of the political system, attitude of the government, the capability and strength of the particular pressure group. It also depends on the availability and convenience of methods which the groups have at their disposal. They tend to use any possible methods that will provide maximum benefit in the

group's interests. Following are some common tactics employed by pressure groups:

8.7.1 Lobbying

Lobbying refers to an effort made by pressure groups to influence government decisions. Lobbying is one of the most common and significant persuasive tactics used by pressure groups. The term 'lobby' is derived from the lobby or the hall of Britain's House of Commons. Therefore, lobbying refers to any attempt or efforts made by individual members or groups, usually in the lobbies or halls of parliament buildings, to garner support for their cause by influencing politicians, legislatures, or anyone who is in the government or in the authority of policy-making. The act of lobbying can be conducted in multiple ways, such as direct personal contacts, sending delegations or representatives, writing of letters, telephone calls, email conversations or any other form of communication activity that can be used for persuasion. Although the act of lobbying remains highly personal basically associated with private activities of individual members of the group, it may also occur on a large scale in which several individual members try to convince and persuade those who have the power to decide policy decisions such as member of the legislature, ministers or government officials etc. Pressure groups may also lobby through advertisement in popular media such as newspaper, radio, television etc. in order to convince those in the position of power. The process of lobbying may also include actions involving favours, inducements and offerings to lure the officials in order to get the work done.

8.7.2 Shaping Public Opinion

To highlight and convey their issues and concerns to the government, pressure groups widely use the tactic of public-opinion campaigns. A public-opinion campaign is basically geared to attract media attention and also to sensitize the public at large in order to gain wider influence. For this, pressure groups use several platforms such as use of mass media, issuing press release, distributing pamphlets, organizing public meetings etc. In doing such publicity exercise, pressure groups are able to shape public opinion in their favour on the one hand and to present a criticism of the government policy on the other. The purpose of influencing public opinion is to alert the government thereby making their voice heard.

8.7.3 Publicity and Propaganda

Publicity and propaganda are another common technique used by pressure groups. Pressure groups usually do this by propagating their interests through mass media, such as newspapers, radio, television, internet, and so on. Through this pressure groups can highlight their demands and opinions as well as inform and educate the government and the public at large on matters that are crucial for their collective interests. By doing this, pressure groups are able to attract and influence those in authority to accede to their demands.

8.7.4 Strikes and Agitations

Usually pressure groups use peaceful means to achieve their goals. But they may also resort to agitations to get maximum benefits of their demands. Such tactics include strikes, protests, demonstrations, civil disobedience. Strike is a form of agitation which attempts for a temporary stoppage of work to force government or those in authority to concede to their demands. It is one of the most effective and common form of agitation adopted by pressure groups. Strikers often refuse to carry out their legitimate duties and may try to persuade others not to perform their duties. Though most forms of strikes are constitutional and peaceful, they sometime go out of control and result in violent. *Bandh* and *Gherao* are other forms of direct-action methods. A *Bandh* is a combination of a strike and a shutdown or blockade. Participants refrain from economic activity and usually set up roadblocks or shut office, shops, public transport etc., to 'enforce' the *bandh*. *Gherao*, on the other hand, involves the confinement of government officials by members of pressure groups for forcing them to concede to their demands. It is similar to picketing in which people congregate outside a place of work or location where an event is taking place to draw public attention to a cause. In India, most pressure groups rely more on direct action methods and less on techniques like lobbying.

Pressure Groups in India and the West

India and Western countries are democracies. But within Western countries there are differences between Presidential and Parliamentary forms of government. India though a parliamentary democracy differs from such countries of the West in terms of developmental levels. Therefore, there are some differences in the role of pressure groups. Firstly, the American pressure groups are regarded as the fourth organ of the government, but the Indian pressure groups are not yet able to play such a significant role in politics. Secondly, in India and Great Britain, the cabinet and civil service are the main targets of pressure groups for lobbying purposes rather than the parliament. However, the targets of American pressure groups are the Congress and its committees rather than the President for lobbying purposes. Thirdly, in India, pressure groups based on caste, religion, region, etc. are more powerful than the modern groups like business organisations. Finally, a significant feature of American pressure groups is that they take interest in foreign policy issues while in India pressure groups are concerned more with domestic policy issues and problems, and less with foreign policy matters. Despite these differences, democratic politics presupposes the crucial role of pressure groups for serving the interests of different sections of society.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) Check your answer with the answer given at the end of the unit.

- 1) Why do pressure groups attempt to pressurize the government? Elaborate some pressure tactics used by pressure groups.

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- 2) What is lobbying?

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8.8 PRESSURE GROUPS IN MODERN POLITICAL SYSTEM

Group activity is a feature of every democracy and, indeed, of many authoritarian states as well. Although pressure groups have existed for long and will continue to do so into the foreseeable future, it is difficult to assess their role in a democracy. This is because of the multiplicity and diversity of pressure groups. There are simply too many of them and they vary in terms of their aims, composition and method. Some engage in continuous political activity while others do so intermittently or vanish after accomplishing their objective. Given this, the generalised comments we make here do not apply to all pressure groups in all circumstances.

For those who take a positive view of pressure-group activity, these groups enhance our democracy and have an important role in the political processes. Pressure groups enable individuals to associate with one another and voice their interests and grievances which are essential rights in any democracy. Their activities give representation and voice to the minorities or the disadvantaged sections of the society who are not adequately represented in the government. For instance, women, ethnic minorities, gays, transgenders that are inadequately represented by political parties, find opportunity to express any resentment about their treatments, and to suggest ideas that would help overcome obstacles that prevent them from fulfilling their potential.

Pressure group activity also encourages wider participation in decision making process. Ordinary individuals participate in political life only during election time. Elections which are held once in four or five years may not allow voters to express a preference on individual issue. Pressure groups give an opportunity to individuals be politically active and to make a contribution to the working of democracy between elections.

Pressure groups act as a link between the people and the government, a useful intermediary between the electors and those whom they elect, allowing a variety

of views to be expressed. They counter the monopoly of the political process by political parties. As one political scientist put it “The views which pressure groups convey are legitimate interests...Modern democracy would not exist without pressure groups. As a channel of representation, they are as legitimate as the ballot box.... They can mediate between the government and the governed”(Baggott, 1995).

Pressure groups often provide specialist information to the government and often help in the implementation of policy. Some of the well organised pressure groups often participate in official consultative committees, advisory groups and commissions. Most governments rely on these groups for advice, information specialist expertise and help in implementing policies. Pressure groups thus contribute in the formation, shaping and implementation of public policies.

Finally, activities of pressure groups make the public at large better informed about public policies. These activities keep political system and government more responsive to the aspiration and demands of the people.

However, there are critics who argue that pressure groups can endanger and weaken the democratic process. They argue that relatively small unelected groups of individuals, instead of elected representatives, are able to influence policies and laws. Marxist and Elitist theorists, for instance, argue that politics is always dominated by a small number of people. According to Marxist scholars, pressure groups reflect the prevailing power structure of the system in which few leaders from the capitalist class always control and dominate these pressure groups. This class-based nature of pressure groups ensures the system in favour of the powerful and wealthy class while leaving less for the weaker majority. On the other hand, Elitist theorists explain pressure groups in terms of what Robert Michels called the ‘iron law of oligarchy’ which claim that minorities, often called ‘oligarchs’ always rule these organizations. According to them, majority of the masses, particularly from weaker section of the society are largely unorganized, therefore, they are unlikely to emerge as leaders of pressure groups, because they neither have the resources nor the power to fight in the political battle against the powerful.

Critics of group activity also contend that the methods and tactics used by pressure groups are often corrupt and intimidating. For example, large-scale demonstrations or protest may cause inconvenience to many. Sometimes direct actions methods go out of control, thereby resulting into violent clashes between the protestors and state machineries. However, the right to make a protest, particularly when those in power take actions that are detrimental to a section of society, is a fundamental one in any democracy.

It appears that excessive group power creates the possibility of organised interests foisting their particular views upon elected representatives who are expected to keep the general interest of the people. On the other hand, too little group power poses the threat of elected government behaving in high handed manner and ignoring the legitimate needs and preferences of the people. Given that pressure groups have become indispensable components of modern political life, it is important to draw a line between excessive and reasonable influence of group activity. In general, governments which allow pressure groups to operate

freely are far more accountable and responsive to the public than those without pressure groups.

8.9 LET US SUM UP

Pressure groups are organizations, associations and groups representing the collective interests of their members. They play an important role in democratic politics of a country by articulating the demands and interests of different groups in society. By forming pressure groups, people seek to protect and promote their shared interests and beliefs while exerting pressures on the government. In fact, many of the pressure groups are able to influence the government and change the community's socio-economic and political structures. Since they do not attempt to exercise governing power, they are different from political parties in many ways. Though similar in their orientation and nature, pressure groups are also different from other groups in the society like interest groups, or civil society organizations. They are well structured, organized and formalized in their objectives, working and methods. Though few pressure groups exist for a short time to achieve immediate or specific purpose, majority of pressure groups are long-lived and exert concerted pressures on the government thereby influencing both the policy formulation and policy implementation process in their group's interests.

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8.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1. Group of individuals or associations that seek to exert pressure or influence in the decision-making process of the government in order to gain policy outcome in accordance with their interests. Although pressure groups are

similar to 'interest groups, the former aim to influence the government's decision-making process, the latter do not have the claims against the government or cannot influence the government.

2. Pressure groups aim to influence the decision-making process without directly involve in forming the government. Political parties, on the other hand, are groups that seek to contest elections to form the government.

Check Your Progress 2

1. Almond and Coleman's classification of pressure groups consists of four types. They are: (i) institutional pressure groups, (ii) associational pressure groups, (iii) non-Associational Pressure groups, and (iv) anomic pressure groups

Check Your Progress3

1. Pressure groups constantly attempt to pressurize the government to gain policy outcomes on their behalf. For this they adopt various techniques which include lobbying, propaganda, appeals and petitions, holding of demonstrations, *dharnas*, strikes, *bandh*, boycott, and so on. However, their choice of strategies and techniques are determined by factors such as nature of political system, effectiveness of the group, availability of techniques etc.
2. Lobbying refers to any attempt or efforts made by individual members or groups to garner support for their cause by influencing the government or those who are in the authority of policy-making. It may include actions involving favours, inducements and offerings to lure the officials or leaders to get the work done.

UNIT 9 ELECTORAL PROCESSES*

Structure

- 9.0 Objectives
- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Defining an Electoral System
- 9.3 Varieties of Electoral System
 - 9.3.1 Plurality System
 - 9.3.2 Majority System
 - 9.3.3 Proportional Representation System
 - 9.3.4 Mixed-member System
- 9.4 Factors Affecting the Degree of Proportionality
- 9.5 Different Electoral Systems: An Assessment
 - 9.5.1 Advantages and Disadvantages of Plurality and Majority Systems
 - 9.5.2 Advantages and Disadvantages of Proportional Representation Systems
 - 9.5.3 Advantages and Disadvantages of Mixed-member Systems
- 9.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 9.7 References
- 9.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

9.0 OBJECTIVES

Elections are a hallmark of democratic systems. This unit examines the electoral systems that are in practice across the world. After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the meaning of an electoral system;
- Identify the terminology used in the study of electoral politics;
- Describe and explain the different categories of electoral system;
- Compare the electoral systems that are in use in the world; and
- Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of different electoral systems.

*Mr. Abdul Maajid Dar, Research Scholar in Political Science, School of Social Sciences, Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi

9.1 INTRODUCTION

Election is the process by which people choose, by voting, representatives to act on their behalf, to represent them, in a legislative body. It may be Parliament or even a local body. This process of choice by elections is now almost inseparable from representative democracy.

In the twentieth century, elections have come to be based on the principles of universal suffrage; one person one vote and one vote one value; extensive popular participation; secret ballot; and electoral fairness, competition and choice. Elections, when they are conducted on the basis of these principles, are the central mechanisms through which the project of representative democracy can be realized. They perform the functions of choosing representatives, making governments, ensuring governmental accountability and public representation, providing education to the public and shaping public opinion, facilitating legitimacy for the government, influencing public policy and political parties, and creating a dialogue between voters and political parties.

The focus of this unit is on rules that regulate the mechanics of elections, that is, on the electoral systems. Comparing different electoral systems that are in use across the world, this unit seeks to address the following questions: Do electoral systems matter? What differentiates one form of electoral system from another? Do existing electoral system satisfy the philosophy of democracy? What is the relationship between the electoral systems and socio-political contexts in which they are employed?

9.2 DEFINING AN ELECTORAL SYSTEM

Broadly speaking, an electoral system refers to the set of rules that regulates the mechanics of elections. These rules deal with all aspects of elections such as right to vote; right to contest elections; electoral machinery for conducting elections; nature of voting; structure of the ballot; election campaign, expenditure and financing; district magnitude; electoral threshold; date of voting; fairness in counting of votes; resolution of electoral disputes and so on. In this respect, an electoral system is a broader concept. In a technical sense, an electoral system refers to legal mechanisms that convert votes into seats. Electoral systems are ‘rules for soliciting citizens’ preferences over parties and candidates and for converting those votes into representation’ (Carey, 2018 p. 85).

An electoral system consists of three components: structure of the ballot, electoral formula, and districting and district magnitude. Ballot structure signifies the number of votes a voter can cast or the number of choices a voter can express. Ballots can be *categorical*, permitting a voter to vote for only one candidate and therefore cast a single vote only or *dividual* permitting a voter to divide votes among different political parties or candidates. Ballots can also be *ordinal* allowing voters to rank order the candidates against the list of candidates in the electoral district.

Electoral formula refers to a particular mechanism for converting votes into seats. In other words, it represents the way votes are translated into seats. Generally, there are three such mechanisms for converting votes into seats: *plurality*, *majoritarian* and *proportional*.

Districting refers to the process of dividing the territory into discrete constituencies or electoral districts from which voters elect their representative or representatives to the legislature. Electoral district is what we in India and Britain refer to as constituency. District magnitude refers to the number of seats that are to be filled from each electoral district or constituency. In other words, it represents the number of candidates who are to be elected from any electoral district. It varies from single-member district to multimember district systems (allowing election of more than one candidate).

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with the model answer given at the end of this unit.

1) What is an electoral system as a technical category?

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2) Define the following terms:

a) Structure of the ballot

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b) Electoral formula

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c) District magnitude

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9.3 VARIETIES OF ELECTORAL SYSTEM

Electoral systems that are currently in use vary across the globe. There are many different ways on the basis of which electoral systems can be classified. Classifying them on the basis of structure of the ballot, electoral formula and district magnitude, we get four broad categories: plurality system, majority system, proportional representation system and mixed-member system. Further, different types of systems fall within each of these categories.

9.3.1 Plurality System

Plurality system of election is one of the oldest and most prevalent systems of representation. It is often referred to as the *first-past-the-post system* (FPTP). It is based on plurality rule, meaning that the winning candidate is the one who receives most votes than any other candidate in a particular constituency regardless of whether that candidate has acquired an absolute majority. Examples are Lok Sabha and State Vidhan Sabha elections in India. It is also used in the Philippines and Venezuela and for members of the lower houses of the legislatures in Canada, United Kingdom, and United States. In it, there are single-member constituencies and voters have a single vote which they cast for candidates rather than political parties. So, the structure of ballot in it is categorical. This system is based on the principle that the candidate with the most votes wins, irrespective of the percentage of the vote that this constitutes. For instance, in an election, in which four candidates receive 33, 30, 27, and 20 per cent of votes, respectively, the winner is the candidate who received 33 per cent of the vote. As the number of candidates increases, the minimum number of votes that may be sufficient for election decreases. This method is called first-past-the-post system because it resembles a race in which one whoever reaches the victory post first is declared the (first) winner irrespective of the time taken by him.

9.3.2 Majority System

In order to ensure that the candidate who is declared elected secures more than fifty per cent votes, some methods have been used. The majority system with its two variants- *two-round system* (2RS), and *alternative vote system*- ensures that the winning candidate has absolute majority of the votes cast, that is, 50 percent plus one of the votes.

In the *two-round system*, two rounds of voting take place depending on whether the formula of an absolute majority is achieved on the first round. If an absolute majority is obtained by a particular candidate in the very first round of voting, he or she is declared winner. But, if no candidate wins an absolute majority in the first round, all the candidates below the top two are excluded from the competition and then a second round of voting is held between the top two candidates of whom one will secure an absolute majority of votes. In this system, there are single-member constituencies and voters vote for candidates rather than for political parties. Although voters, who have to vote for a single candidate, may switch from one party at the first round to a different one at the second, they cannot divide their vote in any one round (Gallagher & Mitchell, 2018). In this respect, two-round system falls within the category of categorical ballot structure. It is also called double-ballot or run-off system. It is employed in France, Iran, Mali and Vietnam.

In *alternative vote system* (AV), there are single-member constituencies and is based on preferential voting, meaning that voters rank all candidates in order of preference rather than voting for just one in a particular constituency. They mark '1' beside their first choice, '2' beside their second choice, '3' beside their third, and so on. Votes are counted on the basis of first preferences and winning

candidate requires to secure an absolute majority. If no candidate secures a majority of the voters' first preferences, the last-placed candidate is excluded and his or her votes are redistributed to the remaining candidates according to the second preferences. This process of eliminating the bottom candidate and redistributing his or her votes to the remaining candidates continues until one candidate secures an absolute majority (at least 50 percent plus one of the votes cast) to become the winner. In this system, structure of the ballot is ordinal and voters vote for candidates rather than for parties. It is known as *preferential voting system* in Australia and as *instant run-off voting* (IRV) in United States.

9.3.3 Proportional Representation System

Proportional representation was invented in the nineteenth century. It was adopted by many European democracies about the turn of the century or in the early decades of the twentieth century (the United Kingdom and France being the main exceptions). It also became a much-preferred electoral system for many national parliamentary elections.

Proportional representation system (PR) is based on the principle that the percentage of seats for each party should be in direct proportion to its percentage vote share secured in the national election. It means that the share of seats in legislature for each party is more or less equal to its vote share. In a purely proportional system, a party, for instance, that secures 30 percent of the national vote receives 30 percent of the seats in the legislature. The major reason many countries have adopted proportional representation is, as the term indicates, to avoid the disproportionalities inherent in majoritarian systems and to achieve a relatively high degree of proportionality between votes cast and seats won. However, as we shall see later, no form of PR produces absolute proportionality in practice.

The PR system has two main types: *single transferable vote system* (STV) and *list systems*. In all PR systems, the size of district magnitude is larger than plurality based FPTP system and majority systems, that is, there are either multimember constituencies or single, national constituency, and voters have a single vote to cast.

In *single transferable vote system*, there are multimember constituencies and voters vote for candidates, not for parties. From each party there may be as many candidates in the contest as there are seats to fill in a particular constituency. Like alternative vote system, it employs preferential voting, meaning that voters (having a single vote only) rank the candidates in order of preference rather than voting for just one in a particular constituency. The winning candidates require to obtain a particular quota, generally known as *Droop quota*, which represents the minimum number of votes that the candidates must secure in order to become the winners. The Droop quota is:

$$q = [V/(M+1)] + 1,$$

Where q represents the electoral quota sufficient for election, V represents the total number of valid votes cast, and M is the district magnitude, that is, total number of seats to be filled in the constituency. For example, in the constituency

where 100,000 valid votes are cast and district magnitude is four, the Droop quota is:

$$\begin{aligned} Q &= [100,000/(4+1)] + 1 \\ &= (100,000/5) + 1 \\ &= 20,000 + 1 \\ &= 20,001 \end{aligned}$$

In this case, the four seats are captured by only those four candidates who satisfy the electoral quota, that is, who secure 20,001 or above 20,001 of votes. Under single transferable vote system, votes are counted on the basis of first preferences. The candidates obtaining the votes more than the quota on first preferences are elected and their surplus votes (the votes above the quota) are transferred to the remaining candidates according to second preferences in order to fill all the seats in the constituency. If no candidate secures the required quota or seats are still unfilled even after transferring the surplus votes on first preferences, the last-placed candidate is excluded and his or her votes are transferred to the remaining candidates according to second preferences. This process of transferring the surplus votes of elected candidates or the votes of excluded candidates continues until all the seats are filled in the constituency. The single transferable vote system thus relies on ordinal ballot structure. This method is used in the elections to Indian Rajya Sabha, with each State Assembly as one multiple-member constituency and each MLA has one transferable vote. It is also used for our State Legislative Councils, for the Senate of Australia, and for parliamentary elections in Malta and Ireland.

In *list system*, often known as party list system, there are either multimember constituencies or single, national constituency, that is, the whole country is regarded as a single constituency (as in Netherlands, Israel and Slovakia). Each party prepares a list of candidates for all the seats or less than the number of seats to be filled and presents the list before the voters. Generally, the voters vote for parties, not for candidates meaning that they vote for the party's submitted list of candidates rather than for an individual candidate. Seats are allocated to the parties in direct proportion to the total number of votes they secure in the national election. It means that each party receives more or less the same share of seats in legislature as of total votes it has secured and then fills these seats from its published list. If a particular party, for example, secures 20 percent of the total vote in an election to a 160-seat legislature, it receives eight seats (160/20) which are then awarded to its top eight candidates on its list. List system is the pure form of PR.

Israel, South Africa and Spain use what may be described as a closed list system in which each party provides a ranked list of candidates for the seats in the legislature and voters vote for the party with having no choice to vote for individual candidates on the list or to alter the order of selection of candidates on the list prepared by the party. Each party allocates the total seats it gains to the candidates on its list in rank order. For example, if a particular party wins nine seats in the national legislature, the top nine candidates on its list capture those nine seats. In this format, 'party officials exert enormous control over political

recruitment, including the ability to include women and minorities near the top of the list' (Hague and Harrop, p. 195). So, it is the party not the voters that determines which of its candidates are to be elected.

Colombia, Finland, Indonesia, Chile, Denmark and Netherlands use the open list system in which each party presents an unranked list of candidates for the seats in the legislature, voters vote for the individual candidate from the party list of their choice and the candidates who secure the most votes in the party list receive the seats the party wins.

9.3.4 Mixed-member System

Mixed-member system refers to an electoral system in which some seats of legislature are filled by a plurality or majority formula using single-member districts, and other seats are filled by PR. For instance, in Germany, 50 percent seats of national legislature are filled by plurality formula in single-member districts while the remaining 50 percent seats are filled by party list variant of PR. Similarly, in New Zealand, 60 percent members of national legislature are elected by plurality formula from single-member constituencies and the remaining 40 percent are elected from party lists. Mixed-member systems aim to achieve a balance between accountability of representatives associated with single-member Plurality system and more fair representation associated with PR system. In mixed systems, Voters cast two votes known as candidate-based vote and party-based vote at the candidate tier (plurality) and party list tier (PR) respectively. There is individual ballot structure as the voters can cast their vote at the candidate tier for a candidate of one party and their list vote at the party tier for a different party if they wish to do so (Gallagher & Mitchell, 2018). The mixed-member system has two types: *mixed-member proportional system* (MMP) and *mixed-member majoritarian system* (MMM). In former, candidate tier and party list tier (acting as lower tier and higher tier respectively) are linked in the sense that the list seats won at the list tier are employed to achieve overall proportionality between the total number of seats won by a party and its list votes. The party or list tier, as a higher tier, acts as a compensatory and corrective as the seats allocated at this tier are employed to compensate the parties that have remained underrepresented at the lower tier and to rectify disproportionalities that have resulted from lower tier. This system is used in Germany and New Zealand. In mixed-member majoritarian system, the candidate tier and party list tier are entirely independent of each other in the sense that there are separate seats for representatives from the two tiers and there is no mechanism about to achieve overall proportionality. This system is used in Japan, Russia and Thailand.

9.4 FACTORS AFFECTING THE DEGREE OF PROPORTIONALITY

Though the forms of PR produce higher levels of proportionality than plurality and majority systems, most of them are not absolutely proportional as their mechanism and practical application provide largest parties an advantage over the smallest parties. Moreover, the levels of proportionality vary across the

variants of PR. It is the variable of district magnitude and device of electoral threshold that contribute in determining the levels of proportionality, among others. As pointed out by James Hogan (1945), “the decisive point in P.R. is the size of the constituencies: the larger the constituency, that is, the greater the number of members which it elects, the more closely will the result approximate to proportionality” (p.13). For example, in Chile, Ireland and Spain, the size of district magnitude on an average is just 2, 3 and 6 respectively. This small district magnitude relatively causes decrease in proportionality in these countries in the sense that it favours the larger parties to such an extent that the smaller parties cannot expect to win a seat in legislature. On the other hand, Israel treats the whole country as a single large constituency. This larger magnitude in Israel relatively generates higher levels of proportionality than Chile, Ireland and Spain signifying that even the small parties can gain representation in legislature provided that there is low threshold as well.

The use of electoral thresholds in some PR systems also influences the levels of proportionality. Thresholds represent the minimum percentage of votes that a party must secure in order to receive seats in legislature. The party that does not cross the given threshold receives no seats. In Israel, for example, where threshold is fixed at 3.25 percent in 2014, the only parties that gain representation or receive seats in legislature are those that cross 3.25% of votes. The use of threshold varies. In Netherlands it is 0.67%, in Japan and Denmark 2%, in Spain 3%, in Italy 4%, in Germany, Belgium, Hungary, New Zealand and Russia 5% and in Turkey 10% (Gallagher, 2005). The reason given behind the imposition of thresholds is to prevent the entry of smallest extremist parties in legislature in order to prevent excessive fragmentation in legislature and ensure governmental stability. Although the imposition of thresholds certainly contributes in protecting the legislature from excessive fragmentation, it at the same time reduces the degree of proportionality in the sense that smallest parties, which generally fail to cross the given threshold, do not gain representation.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with the model answer given at the end of this unit.

1) What do you understand by plurality, majority, proportional representation and mixed-member systems?

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2) Explain the mechanics of two-round and single transferable vote systems.

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- 3) What is the relationship between degree of proportionality and district magnitude and electoral thresholds?

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9.5 DIFFERENT ELECTORAL SYSTEMS: AN ASSESSMENT

In the previous section we shed a light on the mechanics of four broad categories of an electoral system and their variants that are in use across the world. Among these electoral systems, no one is perfect as each of them carries strengths and weaknesses as well. The advantages and disadvantages of each electoral system are mainly judged on the basis of two criteria: stability (stronger government) and fair representation (more representative government). The former is associated with plurality and majority systems, while latter with PR systems. The mixed-member systems are about striking a balance between the two (stability and representation). The advantages and disadvantages of these electoral systems are discussed below.

9.5.1 Advantages and Disadvantages of Plurality and Majority Systems

Advocates of plurality based FPTP system and majority systems insist that these systems produce the following advantages:

1. They, particularly FPTP system, have most simple mechanics which are understandable for everyone and straightforward to implement.
2. They ensure higher levels of candidate recognition and voters' identification with their representative than any other system in that candidates are known to voters who have a strong relationship with their representatives.
3. They enrich clarity of democratic responsibility and accountability by providing citizens in each constituency one representative who is certainly and solely responsible for carrying out duties towards the constituency that he or she represents.
4. They usually produce single-party majority governments. Owing to a cohesive majority in the legislature, such governments tend to be more strong, effective and stable.
5. They hold extremism at bay by preventing small extremist parties to gain representation and legitimacy.

Despite the above advantages associated with plurality and majority systems, detractors argue that these systems are not good for representation due to the following disadvantages that they carry:

1. In these systems, many votes are wasted. Suppose, the four candidates A, B, C and D contesting an election from constituency 'X' have secured 30, 35, 20 and 15 votes of the total number of votes (100) respectively. Under FPTP

system, Candidate B securing merely 35 votes is a winner, while 65 votes, those cast for losing candidates, constitute ‘wasted votes’, the votes that do not contribute towards the election of any candidate or party. It signifies that the voice of 65 voters is ignored.

2. In plurality based FPTP system, it is not certain that the party which wins a majority of the vote nationwide will gain most seats in the legislature simply for the reason that it is the number of seats rather than number of votes won by the candidates of the party in their constituencies that are counted for allocating seats in legislature. This system sometimes creates the situation in which the party that gains majority of votes comes second in seats and the party that comes second in votes gains majority of seats in legislature. As a result, the government in such situations is formed by the party that comes second in votes. Such a situation occurred in Britain in the general elections of 1951 and 1974. This, as Arendt Lijphart argues is ‘probably the plurality method’s gravest democratic deficit’.
3. They cause underrepresentation of small parties. Usually, the candidates of small parties neither gain plurality formula (most of the votes) nor majority formula ($50\% + 1$ of votes) due to which the votes won by them become ‘wasted votes’. Similarly, the minority communities and women may remain underrepresented in these two systems.
4. The plurality based FPTP system undermines the legitimacy of government as it often produces the government formed by the party that does not win even 35 percent of the vote.
5. They encourage ‘tactical voting’, meaning that voters sometimes vote against their own choices when they realize that their favoured candidate belonging to a particular party has no chance of winning an election in their constituency.

Among other reasons, these problems associated with plurality based FPTP system and majority systems made many countries to switch from these systems to PR or Mixed-member systems particularly to achieve the principle of fair representation. Sweden and Denmark moved from FPTP system to PR system in 1908 and 1920 respectively, Norway replaced two-round form of majority system with a PR system in 1921 and New Zealand switched from FPTP system to mixed-member proportional system in 1993.

9.5.2 Advantages and Disadvantages of Proportional Representation Systems

Generally, proportional representation system is seen as an alternative to plurality based FPTP system and majority systems. Advocates of this system insist that it provides broad and fair representation to a wider range of parties and groups and therefore is more democratic than any other electoral system. The main advantages associated with PR systems are:

1. Under them, very few votes constitute ‘wasted votes’ as all parties gain seats in more or less strict proportion to their share of votes.

2. They enable the small parties to gain representation in the legislature as the votes won by them are not simply ignored, but rather counted for allocating seats. What they require is only to cross the given threshold to gain representation.
3. They provide wider opportunities to women and members of minority communities to gain representation in legislature in two ways: their mechanics of counting all the votes for allocating seats, and realization (in fact, politics) on the part of party leaders to include the candidates of these two categories on their party lists.
4. Owing to very less number of wasted votes, PR systems produce higher levels of political participation than plurality based FPTP system and majority systems.
5. They produce a highly representative legislature reflecting the multiplicity of interests and opinions.

On the basis of these advantages, advocates insist that PR systems are more democratic in nature. However, as we observed earlier, these systems can produce real proportionality only when there is large district magnitude and at the same time low thresholds. Moreover, the PR systems are riddled with following weaknesses:

1. They break the link between representatives and their constituencies. In PR systems, there is large district magnitude, and voters vote for parties rather than for candidates in list forms of PR. Because of these two features, neither voters are familiar about their particular representative nor the representatives, whose selection depends on party officials' prepared list (particularly in closed list system), are sensitive towards issues of local levels, that is, their responsibilities and accountability towards the constituencies are unclear and almost absent. Moreover, closed list system makes it difficult for voters to remove an unpopular member as if the party in new election again places the name of that individual near the top of its list, he or she may certainly be re-elected to legislature on the basis of his or her Party's proportional vote share.
2. They produce ineffective, fragmented legislatures and weak and unstable governments by providing representation to a broad range of parties in legislature which leads to formation of coalition governments. Owing to broader representation, often no single party wins a majority of the legislative seats on its own. As a result, a coalition government is formed in such situations which frequently arise in countries using the PR systems. It signifies that coalition governments are inherently associated with PR systems under which the formation of government by a single majority party is very unlikely. Advocates insist that the situation of coalition formation may encourage consensus and bargaining, and thereby the policies of coalition government, as the reflection of wider sections of society, tend to be more stable and effective. But, the critics argue that firstly it is difficult to form coalition government in a highly fragmented legislature, and secondly where it is formed, it may remain unstable. Therefore, PR systems are

frequently criticized for producing governmental instability and ineffective policy-making.

3. They may create a situation where the parties constituting the coalition government may not exercise power in proportion to their electoral strength. While negotiating with larger parties, the small parties may gain disproportionate power (power in excess of electoral strength) in ruling coalition by pressurizing to abandon their support in favour of another party.
4. They may encourage extremism by providing an opportunity to small extremist parties to gain inordinate power in ruling coalition.

9.5.3 Advantages and Disadvantages of Mixed-member Systems

Mixed-member systems consist of some of the advantages of plurality based FPTP system and some of list form of PR system. The countries using these systems seek to achieve what Matthew S. Shugart and Martin P. Wattenberg have called “the best of both worlds”. The 1990s saw the replacement of plurality based FPTP system and PR systems with mixed systems in different countries. For example, Italy switched from list PR system to a mixed-member majoritarian system with partial compensation in 1993 (later, it abandoned this system in favour of bonus-adjustment proportional representation system in 2005), New Zealand replaced FPTP system with a MMP system in 1993, and Japan switched from single non-transferable vote system to a MMM system in 1994. Among others, it is the reason that mixed systems became the main focus of attention for scholars and thereby the traditional debate revolving around plurality versus PR took a U-turn. The mixed systems, like the other electoral systems, have their advantages and disadvantages. Their advantages, particularly of MMP system, centre on the fact that they produce a high degree of proportionality, and at the same time provide a directly responsible and accountable representative for each electoral district. Secondly, because very few votes are wasted, levels of political participation tend to be higher in these systems than FPTP system. Thirdly, in these systems, the presence of single-member constituency component tends to strengthen the electoral strength of two large parties that find it easier to gain a good number of individual seats. Though small parties also gain representation in legislature, the dominance of two large parties makes coalition formation easy and ensures stability than the multiparty coalition governments often formed under PR systems. Fourthly, because of single-member constituency component, they produce high level of candidate recognition than list forms of PR. Lastly, they provide voters a choice to cast their vote at the candidate tier for the individual candidate of one party and their list vote not necessarily for that candidate’s party but rather for a different party.

Mixed-member systems are not free from problems. Firstly, the presence of single-member constituency component contributes in restricting the levels of proportionality. As compared to MMP system, MMM system produces more disproportionalities as there is no mechanism under it to rectify disproportionalities that result from the candidate tier (single-member constituency component). Secondly, they, particularly MMP system, may make the parties and voters to adopt the strategy of manipulation representing that

sometimes on the basis of agreement between the small parties and large party supporters of small party cast their vote at the candidate tier for the candidate of large party to save their candidate-based vote from being wasted while some sympathizers of the large party in return cast their list vote at the list tier for the small party (the allied partner of their party) in order to enable it to cross the threshold. Thirdly, they create two unequal categories of representatives: one from the candidate tier carrying out duties towards the constituency with having no security, and other from the list tier occupying ministerial office and enjoying dominance within the party. Fourthly, they make the party officials more important and dominant as in MMP system it is the number of votes won by the party at the list tier that determines the party's overall number of representatives. Lastly, because of party list component, they produce low levels of candidate recognition than plurality based FPTP system.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with the model answer given at the end of this unit.

1) List some of the advantages of the FPTP system

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2) The two main differences between plurality based FPTP and PR systems are

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3) What are 'wasted votes'? In which system most of the votes are wasted?

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9.6 LET US SUM UP

We have different forms of electoral system each marked by distinctive features and electoral mechanics. None of them is absolute and perfect. Mitchell Gallagher has identified eight criteria for evaluating electoral systems which are: accuracy of representation of voters' preferences; socio-demographic representation in legislature; personal accountability of representatives to constituencies; high levels of political participation; cohesive and disciplined

parties; stable, strong and effective government; identifiability of government options; and opportunity for voters to remove governments from office. The electoral systems that are in use across the world do not satisfy all these criteria except the mixed-member proportional system which nearly comes close to them. The relevance, validity and reliability of each system depends on the context in which it operates and the priorities of the country and the people of that country. As Gallagher has insisted that “which electoral system is ‘best’ depends on just what we want from an electoral system”. The countries giving top priority to stable and effective governments, high accountability and responsibilities of representatives towards their constituencies and ejectable government tend to go for plurality based first-past-the-post system and majority systems using single-member constituencies. Closed list proportional representation system using a single, national constituency may be found in the countries focusing on achieving high degree of proportionality and disciplined form of parties. Single transferable vote variant of PR and open list proportional representation system may attract the countries aiming at realizing high levels of political participation and accountability of representatives along with proportionality.

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9.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) In a technical sense, an electoral system refers to legal mechanisms that convert votes into seats. In this sense, it consists of three components: structure of the ballot, electoral formula, and districting and district magnitude.
- 2) Ballot structure signifies the number of votes a voter can cast or the number of choices a voter can express. It can be categorical, dividual or ordinal.

Electoral formula refers to a particular mechanism for converting votes into seats. District magnitude refers to the number of seats per constituency.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) In plurality system, the winning candidate simply requires to gain most votes. In majority system, the winning candidate is one who receives majority of votes. In PR system, the share of seats in legislature for each party is more or less equal to its vote share. Mixed-member system contains some of the features of plurality based FPTP system and some of list form of PR.
- 2) In two-round system, two rounds of voting take place if no candidate wins majority in the first round. In STV system, the winning candidates are required to obtain a particular quota, generally known as *Droop quota*, and votes are transferred to achieve this quota.
- 3) The small district magnitude and high thresholds decrease the degree of proportionality and vice-versa.

Check Your Progress3

- 1) Simplicity, higher levels of candidate recognition and democratic accountability, and strong and stable governments.
- 2) The two points of difference between them are the levels of candidate recognition and the degree of accountability and representation.
- 3) The votes that do not contribute towards the election of any candidate or party. The number of the wasted votes is far more in plurality based FPTP system than in other electoral systems.